



AETC News Clips

Randolph AFB, Texas



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Pomp and precision again intertwined at Fiesta

Web Posted: 04/27/2006 12:00 AM CDT

Sig Christenson
Express-News Military Writer

As the band struck up "Ruffles and Flourishes," Air Force Brig. Gen. Mary Kay Hertog stood front and center at the reviewing stand.

"Have the colors move forward!" she ordered.

And as 1,500 people looked on Lackland's sprawling parade field, the Air Force's home of basic training once again saluted Fiesta.

The event occurred in un-Fiesta-like weather — an almost chilly wind that forced the Air Force Honor Guard Drill Team to forgo tossing its bayonet-tipped rifles to each other.

But the military's tradition of embracing Fiesta and its celebration of Texas independence continued Wednesday, as it has been since Fort Sam Houston answered the call to the first Battle of Flowers parade in 1891.

"It is an essential part of Fiesta," 2006 Fiesta Commission President Mary West Traylor said, noting that military bands, color guards and other personnel support myriad events.

"What a wonderful way to embrace and celebrate San Antonio's culture and traditions with old friends, new arrivals and visitors to the city while commemorating the significance of the Alamo and the victory at the battle of San Jacinto," said Gen. William R. Looney III, head of the Air Education and training Command at Randolph AFB.

Fiesta and the military share colorful uniforms, sashes and medals. There's pomp, circumstance and royalty. As King Antonio LXXXIV, Rick Shaw, was honored, musicians from the Air Force Band of the West played from a collection of Benjamin Dunford's Fanfares — music long linked to monarchs.

They also have a rich history. There's the time the Buffalo Soldiers rode on horses in the 1899 parade. The motorcar was just around the corner, and with it Maj. Gen. John J. Pershing, who served as grand marshal of the 1917 Battle of Flowers parade.

Fiesta is backed by 100 nonprofit organizations and 75,000 volunteers, among them troops from all four major military installations and smaller units around town — even the secretive Air Intelligence Agency. The National Security Agency, which is moving here, is not involved as far as Fiesta organizers know.

It's a time when generals and enlisted Joes mingle with the town's movers and shakers. Tech. Sgt. Hope Hudson, 28, of Ranger and Master Sgt. Arnaldo Rodriguez Matos were hanging out at the base's Gateway Club with Hertog — commander of Lackland's 37th Training Wing — and businessman Ronnie Gabriel, El Rey Feo LVIII, after the parade.

San Antonio Express News

PAGE: Internet

POSTED: 27 Apr 06



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Based at Lackland, they're "ambassadors" — troops representing installations and units as part of Fiesta. Forbidden from drinking at Fiesta events, military ambassadors still manage to have a little fun.

"I believe San Antonio's like the coral reef of tradition and heritage of past military members," commented Matos, 36, of San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Each base hosts a Fiesta event. About 20,000 people converged Sunday on Fort Sam for a daylong party that wrapped with a concert and fireworks. The post uses Fiesta as an entrée to its annual open house, and Lackland's event, too, was public. But many other events are private, like AETC's pre-Fiesta reception a week ago at Randolph's Officers Club.

Despite its impending realignment in about five years, the Air Force at Brooks City-Base had its annual reception Saturday, with 300 people attending an invitation-only event. Blue-suiters there expect to be involved in Fiesta to the end, Brooks' spokesman Ed Shannon said.

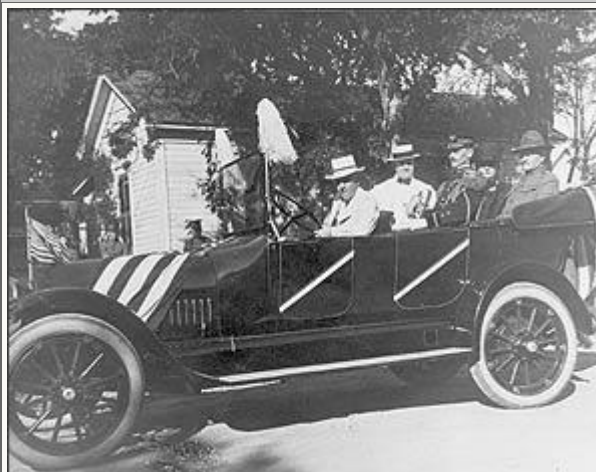
That's around five years from now. Over the decades, neither base closure, war nor the specter of terrorism has stopped the military's embrace of Fiesta, and that suits folks just fine.

"The military and Fiesta go together," Precinct 3 Bexar County Constable Sgt. Joe Ovalle, driver for El Rey Feo LVIII, said after the parade, clasping his hands. "Just like this."



Bob Owen/Express-News

Brig. Gen. Mary Kay Hertog, commander of the 37th Training Wing, awards Rey Feo Ronnie Gabriel the Military Fiesta Medal at the Lackland Fiesta Military Parade on Wednesday.



Courtesy Fort Sam Houston

Gen. 'Black Jack' Pershing (right) rides beside Texas Gov. James Edward Ferguson in the 1917 Battle of Flowers Parade. Others are not identified.

San Antonio Express News

PAGE: Internet

POSTED: 27 Apr 06



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AF officer sentenced in murder-for-hire case

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An Air Force captain stationed at Brooks-City Base was sentenced Wednesday to 20 years in federal prison for charges that he hired someone to kill his estranged wife and her family and friends.

U.S. District Judge W. Royal Furgeson ordered Mohamed Mahmoud Mohamed, 41, to serve the prison term on top of an eight-year sentence he's serving for being convicted in a court-martial.

While serving his court-martial sentence, Mohamed hired a fellow inmate to try to kill his wife, the son he fathered and others connected to the woman. The inmate cooperated with authorities.

Mohamed's wife told Furgeson she and her son have had to hide from Mohamed and that she has deep emotional wounds.

She also said Mohamed beat her so severely he broke her back.

In a court-martial Dec. 13, 2004, he was convicted of assaulting his wife on multiple occasions, threatening the lives of his wife's mother and stepfather and disobeying military orders to stay away from his wife.

Mohamed's brother Elsayed Mohamed, also known as Tarek Mohamed, is awaiting trial over allegations that he mailed money orders from South Carolina to finance the murder-for-hire plan.

San Antonio Express News

PAGE: Internet

POSTED: 27 Apr 06



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Del Rio residents stand firm in opposition to big development

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John MacCormack
Express-News Staff Writer

DEL RIO — If the City Council here had any lingering doubts about the intensity of public opposition to a 3,200-acre development proposed to go next door to Laughlin AFB, the roughly 500 residents who jammed the civic center late Tuesday set council members straight.

Wearing stickers and waving placards that read "Save Laughlin," the crowd appeared to cross all the ethnic, income and cultural lines in this border city of 34,000.

And of the 26 people who spoke during a heated hearing on the project, only one favored it.

Approved on April 11 in a 4-3 council vote, the project now faces a possible recall, either through a public referendum or another council vote.

Opponents say it will endanger the Air Force training base just outside town, which provides many of the best jobs here.

"This is a bad project for Del Rio, and three of you have enough sense to realize that you don't toy with the goose that laid the golden egg," former Councilman Lee Weathersbee said to rousing applause.

Base officials have declined to take a public position on the project, which would sit on Laughlin's western fence line.

Other speakers at the meeting chided the council for voting on the project two weeks ago despite public pleas for a delay and for overlooking other parts of the city badly in need of basic services such as sidewalks, lighting and drainage.

"The citizens of Del Rio get it. Their neighborhoods will not be developed if this project takes place," said Sandra Fuentes, representing "The Border Organization," a sister group to Communities Organized for Public Service in San Antonio.

Several speakers took potshots at developer David Earl of San Antonio, who had a front-row seat for the evening, questioning his character, intentions and track record as a builder.

Earl is developing the \$750 million project with John Schaefer, also of San Antonio.

Plans call for construction of 4,100 residential units, 450,000 square feet of retail space, half a million square feet of business park and 4 million square feet slated for industrial use. Also planned are three schools and a public golf course.

"The gentlemen who designed this won't be here when it goes bad. They will be gone, just like Laughlin AFB," said Jeremy Sibert, pointing at Earl and his associates.

San Antonio Express News

PAGE: Internet

POSTED: 27 Apr 06



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A woman offered the nightmarish — if unfounded — specter of it becoming an enclave of tight-fisted retirees from California.

"They will vote to keep school taxes down. It will change the dynamic of Del Rio. This is a family-based community, and I want it to stay that way," Jane Lorrain said.

Only Bob Dinoir, a retired Border Patrol pilot involved in a separate project with Earl in Del Rio, spoke in support of it.

"The developer is the one at risk. It's not a government giveaway. The project should go forward," said Dinoir, who earned boos for his opinion.

After all the sound and fury, at evening's end the matter stood exactly where it had begun.

With only Councilwoman Pat Cole voting to oppose the motion, the council voted to table the issue for further study.

Earl has claimed that the referendum repeal process outlined in the City Charter cannot be applied to the ordinance in which the council approved the project. The city's outside lawyers share this view, said Mayor Dora Alcalá, a strong supporter of the project.

What happens next is not clear. Contacted Wednesday, Del Rio City Attorney David Sorola said only that "we're going to do more legal research, find out where we stand and what options we have."

Earl, who left the meeting without commenting, did not return calls Wednesday. He has vowed to go forward with site preparation despite public opposition and the attempts to repeal the city's participation in the project.

The project is to be built on a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone in which all property tax revenue would be invested in project infrastructure for 25 years, an amount estimated between \$80 million and \$130 million.

Despite popular fears that it will imperil Laughlin, city officials and the developers said concerns raised by the Air Force have been addressed.

Laughlin, one of four Air Force pilot training bases, sits a few miles east of town on U.S. 90 and is surrounded by miles of undeveloped ranch land.

San Antonio Express News

PAGE: Internet

POSTED: 27 Apr 06